United Nations A/AC.183/PV.210

General Assembly

Official Records

Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People

210th Meeting

Tuesday, 29 November 1994, 10.30 a.m.
New York

Chairman: Mr. Cisse (Senegal)

The meeting was called to order at 10.30 a.m.

International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People

The Chairman *(interpretation from French)*: Today the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People is holding a solemn meeting to commemorate the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, in accordance with General Assembly resolution 32/40 B of 2 December 1977.

It is my pleasure to welcome His Excellency Mr. Amara Essy, President of the General Assembly, Mr. Chinmaya Gharekhan, Special Political Adviser to the Secretary-General and Representative to the Multilateral Peace Talks on the Middle East, His Excellency Mr. Stanley Kalpagé, Chairman of the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and other Arabs of the Occupied Territories, His Excellency Mr. Farouk Kaddoumi, Head of the Political Department of the Palestine Liberation Organization, representative of Palestine, and Mrs. Rosario Green, Assistant Secretary-General, Department of Political Affairs. I should also like to welcome representatives of Member States, intergovernmental organizations and liberation movements, and representatives of non-governmental organizations, members of the press and all those who have accepted the Committee's invitation to participate in this solemn meeting.

I now invite everyone present to rise and observe a minute of silence in memory of all those who have given their lives for the cause of the Palestinian people.

The participants observed a minute of silence.

The Chairman *(interpretation from French)*: I should now like to make a statement on behalf of the Committee.

It gives me great pleasure to welcome you to this year's observance of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People. We are greatly honoured by the participation in this meeting of many eminent guests. For 16 years, it has been our tradition to hold a formal meeting on 29 November of each year in solidarity with the Palestinian people. Throughout this period, the United Nations, its bodies and agencies, and its Secretary-General have contributed to the international community's efforts to bring about the peace, justice and stability of which the peoples of the Middle East have long been deprived.

The three years since the peace process began in Madrid in October 1991 have transformed the region. The parties to the conflict have rejected their age-old attitude of distrust and hatred and have joined forces to achieve a common goal: the establishment of a just, lasting and comprehensive peace in their part of the world. Decisive events had taken place prior to last year's Day of Solidarity. Now, 12 months later, we are once again witnessing events of capital importance. The bilateral negotiations between Israel and the PLO and Israel and Jordan have scored notable successes. Our Committee welcomed the signing by Israel and the PLO of the Agreement on the Gaza Strip and the Jericho Area, the subsequent withdrawal of the Israeli troops from those areas, the deployment of the Palestinian police force, the return of President Arafat and other Palestinian leaders to Gaza and the establishment of the Palestinian Authority.

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Another piece of good news was the signing by the parties of the Agreement on Preparatory Transfer of Powers and Responsibilities regarding the West Bank. The Israeli-Jordanian negotiations have culminated in a peace treaty. Ancient foes have now embarked on the road to peaceful coexistence and mutual respect and cooperation in solving various regional problems.

Significant as this bilateral progress may be, international assistance is no less necessary and urgent if the development of the occupied Palestinian territory and a rapid improvement of Palestinian living conditions are to be ensured so that the peace dividend can yield tangible results. There will also be a need for consistent, targeted and well-structured economic support, which could possibly be incorporated into a future multilateral programme to establish a new economic regime in the region. In that regard, it is extremely gratifying to note the considerable progress that has been made in the multilateral talks on the regional problems of the Middle East. Our Committee has also noted the recent Middle East/North Africa Economic Summit, which it considers to be an important step in the right direction.

Since the beginning of the Madrid peace process, the United Nations has been involved in its various aspects. Last year, once again, in its resolution 48/158 A ,the General Assembly reaffirmed

> "That the United Nations has a permanent responsibility with respect to the question of Palestine until the question is resolved in all its aspects in a satisfactory manner in accordance with international legitimacy".

Last year, in resolution 48/58, the General Assembly recalled

> "that an active United Nations role in the Middle East process and in assisting in the implementation of the Declaration of Principles can make a positive contribution".

In this connection, the Committee welcomed the timely and decisive steps by the Secretary-General in support of the peace process, in particular by appointing a Special Coordinator in the occupied territories. As you know, the Special Coordinator will oversee all United Nations economic, social and other assistance to the Palestinians.

Although the negotiations are continuing, the situation on the ground remains tense. The Israeli authorities often subject the Palestinians to restrictive measures, particularly in the West Bank, including Jerusalem. The repeated closure of the Gaza Strip and the impossible situation facing thousands of Palestinians trying to go to work in Israel have exacerbated their economic difficulties and cannot fail to heighten tensions. The overall economic situation in the occupied territories, particularly the Gaza Strip, is still very worrying. The establishment of settlements near the Holy City has still not stopped. The Committee is also much alarmed by acts of deadly violence that put the peace process in jeopardy.

In its mandate, our Committee will continue to monitor the situation in the region closely, in particular with regard to the exercise by the Palestinian people of its inalienable rights. In cooperation with the Governments and the international NGOs, the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People is working tirelessly to achieve its goals and will spare no effort to help establish a just, lasting and comprehensive peace in the Middle East.

I now have the pleasure to call on the President of the General Assembly, Mr. Amara Essy.

Mr. Essy (President of the General Assembly) (*interpretation from French*): Let me begin, Mr. Chairman, by thanking you and the other members of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People for inviting me to participate in this important observance.

Recognizing the need to promote and encourage international efforts in support of the Palestinian people, the General Assembly, in its resolution 32/40 B called for the annual observance of 29 November as the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People. For the international community, this Day is an opportunity to renew its pledge to the Palestinian people to continue to support its legitimate aspirations and demands.

The question of Palestine has been a major concern of the United Nations practically since its foundation. Despite recent decisive and positive developments, it remains the oldest unresolved conflict on the Organization's agenda. I would recall that the Assembly has repeatedly affirmed that the United Nations bears the historic responsibility of ensuring a just settlement of the question of Palestine based on the exercise by the Palestinian people of its legitimate national rights in accordance with the principles of the Charter and with United Nations resolutions.

All the parties concerned are now increasingly aware that the United Nations has an essential and positive role to play both by facilitating the peace process and by providing the Palestinian people with the economic assistance it urgently needs for its development.

On this Day, it is my pleasure to refer to the progress that has been made towards a settlement of the question of Palestine. Over the past year, we have seen striking developments in the peace process begun at Madrid in October 1991 despite repeated delays and violence provoked by the enemies of peace. We welcomed the signing, on 4 May 1994 at Cairo, of the Agreement on the Gaza Strip and the Jericho Area, the subsequent withdrawal of the Israeli troops from those areas, the deployment of Palestinian police, the return to Gaza of President Arafat and other Palestinian leaders, the establishment of the Palestinian Authority, and the release by the Israeli Government of a number of prisoners. We also noted with pleasure the signing on 29 August 1994 of the Agreement on Preparatory Transfer of Powers and Responsibilities.

During the current session of the General Assembly, the overwhelming majority of delegations have welcomed these developments as important steps towards the implementation of the Declaration of Principles; they have expressed the hope that negotiations will proceed speedily and successfully towards the full implementation of the Declaration. It is also to be hoped that the peace treaty between the State of Israel and the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, signed on 26 October 1994, will lead to rapid progress in negotiations with the other parties to the Middle East conflict. All this bodes well, and shows that a satisfactory solution to this conflict, which has already lasted so long, may now be in sight.

On behalf of the General Assembly, I commend all the parties concerned for the courage and determination they have shown to achieve a just and comprehensive peace settlement in the Middle East. Yet the United Nations must remain vigilant in preventing wear and tear from taking their toll on the results of the agreements that have been concluded thus far. The Organization must be ready to defuse the hostility and mistrust that the peoples of the region continue to feel towards each other, and to continue, in the interests of international peace and security, to work towards a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Middle East.

Under your wise and able guidance, Sir, the Committee has done its best to focus world attention on the plight of the Palestinian people, and that task is far from finished. The Palestinian people are preparing to exercise their inalienable right to self-determination, and that is the very moment when they will need generous support from the international community. The Committee must therefore ensure that the Palestinian people receives all the assistance it needs in order to achieve the exercise of its inalienable rights and take its proper place in the international community.

The Chairman (*interpretation from French*): As members are aware, the Secretary-General is abroad right now and unfortunately cannot participate in our meeting as he would normally have done. I am pleased therefore to call upon Mr. Chinmaya Gharekhan, Special Political Adviser to the Secretary-General and his Special Representative to the multilateral peace talks on the Middle East, who will read out a message from the Secretary-General.

Mr. Gharekhan: I have the honour to read out the text of a message from the Secretary-General on the occasion of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People. The message reads as follows:

> "On this Day last year, I spoke of the historic developments that had taken place in connection with the question of Palestine. The past year has witnessed further dramatic and encouraging developments. Following the Declaration of Principles signed in September 1993 by the Palestine Liberation Organization and Israel, negotiations between the parties led to the signing, in May 1994 in Cairo, of the Agreement on the Gaza Strip and the Jericho Area, the withdrawal of Israeli troops from most of those areas, the establishment of the Palestinian Authority, the deployment of a Palestinian police force, and the signing in August 1994 of the Agreement on Preparatory Transfer of Powers and Responsibilities regarding the West Bank.
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> "Last month we warmly welcomed the signing of the peace treaty between Jordan and Israel. It is my fervent hope that this historic event will be followed by full implementation of the Declaration of Principles and by progress on the Syrian-Israeli and Lebanese-Israeli tracks of the peace process. The goal of the international community — the achievement of a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Middle East based on Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973) — will then truly be within its grasp.

"In commemorating this International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, the United Nations expresses its ongoing responsibility towards the Palestinian people. I take this opportunity to commend the efforts of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People.

"But this occasion is also a time for drawing attention to current needs and difficulties. In that regard, I would be failing in my duty as Secretary-General if I did not draw attention to the dangerous gap which has opened up between the expressed commitment of the international community to support the Palestinian people and the results on the ground.

"The international community has pledged some $670 million for 1994. Yet today, with 11 months of the year already gone, less than $200 million has actually reached the occupied territories. Well over half of that assistance has been channeled through the United Nations programmes and agencies operating in the area.

"In fact, during the past year, the United Nations has significantly enlarged its programmes of economic, social and other assistance in the occupied territories. With a view to ensuring effective coordination and intensification of United Nations assistance, I appointed, in June 1994, Mr. Terje Rod Larsen of Norway as Special Coordinator in the occupied territories. His efforts have focused primarily on Gaza, where needs are greatest. In close cooperation with the World Bank and the donor community, Mr. Larsen is working actively to mobilize the resources and expertise of the United Nations system in support of the Palestinian Authority.

"The experience of the United Nations in other parts of the world has shown repeatedly that, in a post-conflict situation, the infusion of economic resources, together with concerted action on a number of other fronts, is essential if true and lasting peace is to be secured.

"The commitment of the international community to the peace process in the region was and remains crucial to its success. But that political commitment must now be matched by immediate, tangible support for the Palestinian people as they begin the task of rebuilding their society.

"Today, therefore, I call on the international community to ensure the prompt and effective delivery of the assistance already pledged — but not yet delivered — to the Palestinian people, in the course of this year.

"I also call on States Members of the United Nations to make every effort to sustain, and if possible to increase, current levels of support in the course of 1995.

"It would be tragic indeed if the failure of the international community to match its words with deeds were to jeopardize a peace process for which so many have given so much — including, in some cases, their lives — at a time when a lasting and comprehensive peace seems to be at last within sight in the Middle East.

"On this important occasion, I reiterate my pledge to make every possible effort in support of peace in the Middle East, and to ensure that the United Nations system contributes its utmost in the fields of economic and social development. The Palestinian people, to whom this Organization has maintained a special commitment for nearly five decades, deserve no less."

The Chairman (*interpretation from French*): I should like to ask Mr. Garekhan to be kind enough to convey to the Secretary-General the Committee's thanks for his encouraging words and for his efforts to promote a comprehensive, just and lasting solution to the question of Palestine, and for his support for the Committee's work.

I now have the pleasure of calling on Mr. Al-Kidwa, the Permanent Observer of Palestine, to read out a message from His Excellency President Arafat.

Mr. Al-Kidwa (Palestine) *(interpretation from Arabic)*: It is my honour to read out the letter by Mr. Yasser Arafat, President of Palestine, Chairman of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), and President of the National Palestinian Authority, which he has addressed to this solemn meeting.

"On the occasion of the solemn meeting you are holding today, 29 November, in observance of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, it gives me pleasure to convey to you, Sir, on behalf of the Palestinian people, on behalf of my colleagues the members of the Executive Committee

of the Palestine Liberation Organization and the members of the Palestinian National Authority and on my own personal behalf, the sincerest greetings and best wishes and our great thanks for your kind invitation to attend the meeting and address this demonstration of solidarity.

"I should also like to convey to you personally, Mr. Chairman, to your Committee and to the United Nations and its Secretary-General our warm gratitude and deep appreciation for your dedicated and sustained efforts and your important activities in solidarity with and in support of the just struggle of the Palestinian people to put an end to Israeli occupation of its land and its holy places and for the restoration and exercise of its inalienable national rights and, primarily, its right to exercise self-determination and establish an independent State with its capital at Jerusalem.

"For many years now, the United Nations Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People has been tirelessly expanding its activities in solidarity with our people, and this has had a major impact in promoting, mobilizing and giving direction to world-wide support and to the rising tide of solidarity with our people's just struggle. This is an effort that we value very highly and it will continue to enjoy the greatest appreciation and respect of our people.

"In the difficult and crucial circumstances in which our people finds itself today, there is even a greater need than ever for more such worthy activities and efforts. The present critical stage represents a decisive turning-point in the progress of our people's just struggle and in the history of the region. The Palestinian people has now begun the process of building and reconstruction. It has begun to establish vital amenities and national institutions, to rebuild the economy and its infrastructure and to lay firm foundations and establish sound structures for the Palestinian National Authority so that a just and comprehensive peace can be established and consolidated in Palestine and in the region, a peace of the brave based on the principles of good neighbourliness, cooperation and peaceful coexistence.

"Such a peace must ensure the rights, security, stability and prosperity of all the peoples and States of the region and, for the Palestinian people, the end of Israeli occupation of its land and holy places and the restoration and exercise of the inalienable national rights of which the Committee is the most worthy stalwart defender in striving to achieve recognition of those rights and their exercise in practise.

"If this is to be achieved, Israel must comply with the provisions of the Declaration of Principles signed at Washington on 13 September 1993, of the Cairo Agreement signed on 4 May 1994 and of subsequent agreements, and it must cease procrastinating, postponing the implementation of those agreements and must desist from trying to ignore certain of their provisions.

"In this connection, not only the sponsors of the Peace Conference in particular but also the European Union and the international community in general bear a major responsibility and must urge the Israeli Government to comply with the undertakings it has made and to proceed with the rapid implementation in good faith and to the letter of all the agreements concluded on the Palestinian-Israeli track.

"This is the ideal solution, and is the only way to counter extremist and fanatical tendencies and repulse the enemies of peace — on whatever side and wherever they may be, and whether they be individuals, parties, agencies or States — so that peace may reign in the land of peace, the Holy Land of Palestine. Failing this, danger threatens the first steps we have taken to secure a genuine Palestinian-Israeli peace that represents both a key to comprehensive peace in the region and a firm foundation for it.

"We also urge donor countries quickly to fulfil the financial undertakings given to our people and enable them to move ahead with building and reconstruction and mitigate the bitter suffering of our Palestinian people so that they can perceive the fruits and benefits of the peace process they have chosen and to which they have committed themselves so that they decide to pursue it resolutely and persistently until the desired goals are reached, including other people's right to freedom, independence and sovereignty.

"We are firmly convinced that all friendly and fraternal peoples and States and all those that cherish peace, justice and freedom in the world will steadfastly support our people, will maintain their solidarity of principle with it and will increase their support and backing for it until the achievement of that peace of the brave to which we have committed

ourselves on behalf of our people, and whose benefits will encompass our people, all the peoples and States of the region and all the peoples of the world. Hence, we look to the Committee, which has never wavered in making every effort within its power to support us and has been granted great success in carrying out its tasks, to continue to shoulder its worthy burden and step up its activities in support of our people's just struggle by urging the international community to provide increased support and assistance to the Palestinian people and to act in solidarity with it in its long and arduous struggle to achieve real peace in its own land, the blessed land of peace that should be both the gage and the very exemplar of peace.

"I salute you, Sir, and I thank you. I wish your distinguished Committee every success in its worthy tasks."

The Chairman (*interpretation from French*): I ask Mr. Al-Kidwa to convey the Committee's thanks to His Excellency Mr. Yasser Arafat for his important message. I should like to assure President Yasser Arafat and, through him, the Palestinian people, of the Committee's unwavering determination to continue and intensify its efforts under its mandate to contribute to the search for a comprehensive, just and lasting solution to the question of Palestine that will enable the Palestinian people to exercise, as soon as possible, its inalienable national rights.

I now call on Mrs. Madeleine Albright, President of the Security Council.

Mrs. Albright (President of the Security Council): We have witnessed dramatic breakthroughs over the last year in the relationship between Palestinians and Israelis. The Palestine Liberation Organization and Israel have concluded historic agreements and are working together towards their implementation. With these agreements, the Palestinian people have begun the process of exercising self-rule in Gaza and Jericho. We all hope that the commitment to negotiation as a path to achievement of their legitimate rights will bring the Palestinian people the rewards of reconciliation and peace.

We are aware that the transitional process poses a need for extensive economic assistance to the Palestinians as they create effective institutions of self-rule and seek to improve their quality of life.

We share in the international community's overwhelming support for the agreements reached and in its readiness to help the Palestinian people build a healthy economy through a working mechanism for channelling international aid efficiently and effectively. We hope that the resources of donor countries and of the United Nations will arrive quickly, be well coordinated and focused where they are most needed — in Gaza and Jericho — on projects to raise residents' living standards. As the Casablanca economic summit recognized, the new opportunities for regional economic cooperation and development need to begin with the development of the Palestinian economy.

For many years, the Security Council has been closely associated with the efforts to achieve a just, lasting and comprehensive peace in the Middle East. As President of the Council, I am particularly gratified that the progress achieved has been reached in the course of negotiations based on Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973). The Council can be proud that these resolutions are the basis for the success generated on several bilateral tracks of the peace process, in the framework of the peace conference on the Middle East convened at Madrid on 30 October 1991.

The Palestinians, Israelis and other peoples of the Middle East have begun the journey towards a just, lasting and comprehensive peace. Until that goal is achieved, the Security Council, guided by its responsibilities under the Charter, is committed to continuing its efforts on behalf of all parties concerned, including the Palestinian people.

The President (*interpretation from French*): On behalf of the Committee, I should like once again to thank His Excellency the President of the General Assembly, Her Excellency the President of the Security Council and the Representative of the Secretary-General for having participated in the first part of our meeting.

The meeting was suspended at 11.10 a.m. and resumed at 11.15 a.m.

The Chairman *(interpretation from French):* I have the pleasure of inviting Mr. Stanley Kalpagé, Chairman of the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories, to make a statement on behalf of his Committee.

Mr. Kalpagé (Chairman, Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied

Territories): On behalf of the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories, and on my own behalf, I have the honour of conveying this message on the occasion of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People.

Important developments have continued to take place in the Middle East following the historic signing of the Declaration of Principles. The hope and optimism that the Declaration generated was reinforced by the subsequent signing, in Cairo on 4 May 1994, of the Israel-Palestine Liberation Organization Agreement on the Gaza Strip and Jericho.

Despite these positive developments, the Government of Israel continues to deny the Special Committee access to the occupied territories — a situation that has remained unchanged since the establishment of the Committee in 1968. The Committee's attempt to carry out a limited visit to the Gaza Strip and Jericho in August 1994, following the establishment of the Palestinian Authority there, did not meet with the approval of the Israeli authorities.

In keeping with past practice, and despite these constraints, the Special Committee has tried to provide a faithful and comprehensive picture of the human rights situation in the occupied territories. Its findings are contained in its twenty-sixth report to the General Assembly (A/49/511).

The Special Committee had hoped that the momentum created by the new situation would be translated into the reality of a truly meaningful culture of respect for human rights in the region. It tried to establish whether the encouraging political developments had generated any significant changes in the general situation affecting the human rights of the Palestinian people and other Arabs of the occupied territories, as well as in their daily lives. The Committee felt that there are a number of areas where important changes remain to be made if there is to be a genuine improvement.

The principal source of tension in the occupied territories is the continued existence of Israeli settlements and the increasingly violent behaviour of settlers in the wake of the signing of the Declaration of Principles. The most tragic example of acts of violence committed by settlers is the killing of 29 Palestinian worshippers at the Ibrahimi Mosque in Hebron on 25 February 1994, by a settler from Kiryat Arba. A considerable expansion of existing settlements is reported to have taken place, in at least 15 locations, since the signing of the Declaration of Principles.

The Committee welcomes the provision, in the Cairo Agreement, for the release of about 5,000 Palestinian prisoners. Although most of these have been released, the continued incarceration of approximately 6,000 Palestinians in Israeli prisons and detention centres and the alleged deterioration in their conditions of detention is an additional threat to the smooth evolution of the peace process. A particularly preoccupying allegation was that of the continued practice of torture and ill-treatment.

The economic situation of the inhabitants of the occupied territories remains precarious. It has been aggravated further by the closure of the occupied territories imposed by the Israeli authorities after serious security incidents. This closure amounts to collective punishment. Employment in Israel remains the principal source of income for the majority of the population. Closures have also had a negative impact on the enjoyment of certain fundamental freedoms, including freedom of religion.

The Special Committee hopes that the early transfer of responsibilities to the Palestinians in the fields of education and culture, health, social welfare, direct taxation and tourism constitutes a first step in the process of restitution of all the occupied territories and that it will bring about an immediate improvement in the daily lives of the population there. The determination, wisdom and spirit of understanding that led to the signing of the Declaration of Principles and of the Cairo Agreement must be translated into reality through practical compliance with all universally accepted standards of international humanitarian and human rights law.

The Special Committee hopes that tangible progress will also be made in the negotiations concerning the occupied Syrian Arab Golan. The Special Committee also hopes that its findings will be taken into account in determining the specific measures designed to give life to the spirit of the recent positive developments. It believes that a positive approach in this regard could further strengthen the peace process, thus enabling all the people of the Middle East to live in harmony, dignity and peace.

The Chairman (*interpretation from French*): I now have the pleasure of calling on His Excellency Mr. Nugroho Wisnumurti, Permanent Representative of Indonesia, who will read a message from His Excellency Mr. Soeharto, President of the Republic of Indonesia, in his capacity as the Chairman of the Tenth Conference of

Heads of State or Government of the countries of the Non-Aligned Movement.

Mr. Wisnumurti (Indonesia): I have the distinct privilege to read out a message from His Excellency Mr. Soeharto, President of the Republic of Indonesia and Chairman of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries, on the occasion of the observance of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People. The message reads as follows:

"On the occasion of the observance of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, it is a distinct honour and privilege for me, as Chairman of the Non-Aligned Movement, to reaffirm our unflinching support for that people's heroic struggle to attain the inalienable right to self-determination and to establish a sovereign independent State in its own homeland.

"The question of Palestine has always been at the forefront of the deliberations and activities of the Non-Aligned Movement. Individually, every State Member of the Movement has assumed as its very own the struggle of the Palestinian people, which is striving for the attainment of its legitimate rights. Their struggle is indeed our struggle. It is undeniable that the Movement as a whole has provided an effective avenue for the collective expression of solidarity with the Palestinian people. In this context, I should like to recall that, since the convening of the historic Asian-African Conference in Bandung in 1955, followed by the founding of the Non-Aligned Movement in 1961, it was universally recognized that the attainment of the rights of the Palestinian people is a *conditio sine qua non* for achieving lasting and comprehensive peace in the region. Towards this end, we have consistently called for the strict implementation of all relevant United Nations resolutions to bring about a just solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict.

"Significant developments during the past year have bolstered our optimism regarding an end to the long suffering of the Palestinian people. The signing of the historic Declaration of Principles on Palestinian Interim Self-Government Arrangements and the subsequent Cairo Agreement on the Gaza Strip and the Jericho Area between the PLO and the Government of Israel constitute important milestones in the efforts to achieve a peaceful and lasting settlement of the Middle East question, an objective to which the Movement has been committed since its inception.

"In the journey towards peace, one of the most dramatic signs of the changing times was reflected in the triumphant and long-awaited return of Chairman Yasser Arafat to the Gaza Strip and Jericho after 27 years in exile. We laud the Palestinian leadership for its foresight and wisdom in taking these crucial initial steps for the cause of peace. It is our earnest hope that every gesture towards peace made by the Palestinians will be reciprocated by Israel, and that efforts in overcoming the enmity, injustice and mutual suspicion that have long plagued the region will prevail; for, notwithstanding the successes achieved so far, the road ahead is still strewn with numerous obstacles and difficulties.

"Decades of Israeli occupation have not only inflicted immense hardship on the Palestinian people, but have also destroyed basic infrastructures in the occupied territories. Concerted and determined efforts are therefore essential to overcome these challenges. In this regard, we firmly believe that the international community bears a solemn responsibility to extend full assistance to the nascent Palestinian Authority to enable it to implement the policies necessary for better living conditions in the occupied territories. It is beyond doubt that political, social and economic development are interdependent and vital to long-term stability. In this context, we are gratified by the recent appointment of the United Nations Special Coordinator to provide overall guidance and facilitate effective coordination of international assistance to the Palestinian people in meeting both their immediate and long-term needs.

"However, the task of transforming Gaza and Jericho from areas of conflict and poverty into areas of peace and prosperity should not divert attention from the other problems that have engulfed the region. In this connection, it is essential to ensure that positive results emanate from the ongoing negotiations concerning the extension of Palestinian self-rule throughout the West Bank, including Jerusalem. Furthermore, while we welcome the progress recently achieved on the Israel-Jordan track of negotiations, as reflected in the signing of the Washington Declaration on 25 July 1994, comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Middle East requires progress along other tracks in Arab-Israeli negotiations too. We therefore reaffirm that a lasting settlement of this question must entail the complete withdrawal of Israel from all Palestinian territory, including Jerusalem; from the Syrian Golan Heights and from other occupied

Jordanian and Lebanese territories; respect for the right of all States in the region to live in peace within secure and internationally recognized borders; the recognition and exercise of the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people, primarily the right to self-determination; and the implementation of Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 425 (1978). We also urge Israel to adhere, in the occupied territories, to the provisions of the Fourth Geneva Convention to restore human rights; and to lift the restrictions that have for so long impeded the political, economic, social and cultural activities of the Palestinian people.

"At this critical juncture in the destiny of the Palestinian people, we deem it essential for the United Nations to remain seized of the question of Palestine and to play a central role in the peace process, for what is at stake is not only the future of an entire people, but also peace, security and stability in the region and beyond.

"In commemorating this solemn occasion, let us reaffirm our commitment to leaving no stone unturned to restore the usurped rights of the Palestinian people. The Non-Aligned Movement will continue to lend its unwavering support to the Palestinian people and to the PLO, their sole representative, as they begin to rebuild their lives and nation. We remain convinced that they will emerge victorious.

"Finally, I should like to commend the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People for its determined efforts in mobilizing world public opinion for the achievement of the sacred Palestinian cause, namely, the effective exercise of their sovereignty in the already proclaimed Palestinian State."

The Chairman (*interpretation from French*): I thank the representative of Indonesia and request him to convey to His Excellency President Soeharto the sincere thanks of the Committee for his very important message.

I now call upon the representative of Pakistan, who will read a message from His Excellency Mr. Sardar Aseff Ahmed Ali, Foreign Minister of Pakistan, in his capacity as Chairman of the twenty-first Islamic Conference of Foreign Ministers.

Mr. Umir (Pakistan): I have the honour to read out the message from the Foreign Minister of Pakistan in his capacity as the Chairman of the Islamic Conference of Foreign Ministers. The message reads as follows:

"Solidarity with the Palestinian people and support for their just cause was the main inspiration for the creation of the Islamic Conference. The establishment of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) bears testimony to the deep commitment of the Islamic world to the Palestinian struggle for self-determination and nationhood. Since its creation 25 years ago, the OIC has consistently supported the valiant struggle of the Palestinian people and promoted their legitimate interests and aspirations.

"The Palestinians have recently acquired self-rule in Gaza and Jericho. It is our earnest hope that the Middle East peace process will culminate soon in the realization of a sovereign and independent Palestinian State. The OIC will continue to extend its wholehearted support to the Palestinian people in their endeavour to achieve this objective. The OIC accords central importance to the restoration of Al-Quds al-Sharif to Muslim sovereignty in accordance with the relevant Security Council resolutions. For a lasting and comprehensive peace, it is imperative that Israel must demonstrate its sincerity and commitment to the basic norms of peace and justice in its relationship with the Palestinian people.

"The people of Palestine need vital economic assistance to recover from long years of occupation. The United Nations and its specialized agencies must offer full cooperation to enable them to rebuild their economy and develop their national institutions. The international community should also come forward with tangible measures of support for the rehabilitation of the Palestinian territories."

The Chairman (*interpretation from French*): I would ask the representative of Pakistan to convey to His Excellency Mr. Sardar Aseff Ahmed Ali the sincere thanks of the Committee for his important message.

The next speaker is the Permanent Representative of Tunisia, who will read out a message from His Excellency President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, President of the Republic of Tunisia, in his capacity as current Chairman of the Organization of African Unity.

Mr. Abdellah (Tunisia)(*interpretation from Arabic*): It is my honour and pleasure to read out a message from His Excellency President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, current

Chairman of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) to the Committee on the occasion of our commemoration of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People. The message reads:

"As we commemorate the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian people, we have witnessed some radical changes on the route towards a just, lasting and comprehensive peace for the Palestinian people, notably Israel's recognition of the PLO as the legitimate representative of the Palestinian people and the signing of the Declaration of Principles on 13 September 1993 in Washington.

"Now that the Palestine National Authority is exercising its mandate over Gaza and Jericho and there is a beginning to Palestinian self-rule, we feel more optimistic about the Palestinian people's attainment of their inalienable rights, first and foremost their right to self-determination and the establishment of an independent State on their land.

"The Middle East region is the cradle of human religions and civilizations. It is a crucial geographic area of our world and deserves peace and security. It deserves to be able to build the future of its peoples on the basis of friendly relations between neighbouring countries and peoples, including the valiant Palestinian people, on a basis of equality and justice.

"Today, we should like to express our appreciation to the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People. The Committee has always epitomized international solidarity. On this occasion, we should like to reaffirm our continuing support for the ongoing and noble efforts, on the basis of the solidarity between all peace-loving countries and founded on justice, that have been undertaken by the Organization, since its inception, to enable the Palestinian people to exercise their inalienable rights and assuage their suffering.

"The valiant Palestinian people are steadfastly facing the enormous challenge involved in their exercise of their sovereignty, rebuilding their land and establishing the national institutions that will be the nucleus for an independent State. Such a State would enable the Palestinian people to live peace as a reality and to return to the fold of the international community.

"A lasting, comprehensive and just peace in the Middle East cannot be achieved without support for the Palestine National Authority in its efforts to rebuild after decades of occupation and conflict. Here, we should like to emphasize our commitment to a just and lasting peace in the Middle East and the exercise of the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people, as well as our support for the principle of freedom. Thus, we are committed to supporting the Palestine National Authority.

"We call on the international community once again, especially the donor community, to increase its efforts in support of the Palestinian people. We also wish to highlight the very important role played by the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People towards the ultimate goal of the Palestinian people's enjoying its inalienable rights and establishing an independent State with its capital in Jerusalem, in conformity with all relevant international resolutions.

"Peace requires a great deal of perseverance and sincerity, and a commitment to the rules of open dialogue. The United Nations has a great responsibility in the maintenance of international peace and security world wide, and it should accord due priority to the Palestinian cause, which is a just cause and the key to peace and security in the Middle East.

"We shall continue to support all efforts aimed at establishing a just, lasting and comprehensive peace in the Middle East. We express our very best wishes for the success of the Committee's work in its role of helping achieve peace and security in the region."

The Chairman (*interpretation from French*): I thank the representative of Tunisia and request him to convey the Committee's sincere thanks to his President for his message.

I now have the pleasure of calling on Mr. Mahmoud Aboul-Nasr, Permanent Observer of the League of Arab States.

Mr. Aboul-Nasr (League of Arab States) (*interpretation from Arabic*): I have the honour of reading out to the Committee a message from Dr. Ahmed Esmat Abdel Meguid, Secretary-General of the League of Arab States, on the occasion of the commemoration of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People:

"As we commemorate the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, I am pleased to express my great appreciation for the work of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People in its efforts to arrive at a just and lasting solution to the Palestinian problem and to defend the legitimate national rights of the Palestinian people, foremost among which is its right to self-determination and to establish its own independent State on its national homeland.

"We fully appreciate the fact that the Committee has consistently called upon Israel, the occupying State, to desist from its attempts to alter the demographic or geographical conditions in the occupied Arab territories, particularly in the holy city of Jerusalem. The Committee has also urged Israel to comply with international resolutions in this respect, and has considered all administrative and legislative measures taken by the occupation authorities as null and void and as an impediment to peace.

"Here I should like to stress the danger of Israel's persistence in taking steps that run contrary to the letter and spirit of the peace process, which has come to constitute the great hope and aspiration of the Arab peoples. There is no doubt that the Israeli occupation authorities continuing to take provocative measures — such as the closure of the Ibrahimi mosque in Hebron in the West Bank following the massacre committed by Israeli settlers against Palestinian worshippers — is in flagrant violation of international law. Israel has recently divided the mosque and given the larger part of it to Jewish worshippers who belong to extremist groups. There is no doubt that such measures are in flagrant violation of the sanctity of holy places, and are likely to create many factors for instability and suspicion in the region.

"It is also deplorable to have to note that the Israeli authorities have continued to expand and intensify the establishment of settlements in the occupied West Bank, particularly around the holy city of Jerusalem. This raises a great deal of suspicion concerning Israel's commitment, seriousness and real intentions *vis-à-vis* the peace process.

"Developments in the region clearly indicate the eagerness of Arab countries to establish the foundations for a just and comprehensive peace. The peace sought by the Arab countries is one based on justice and founded on a commitment to the implementation of international law in the Arab-Israeli conflict and on the principle of land for peace. It is also based on the recognition of the legitimate, just rights of the Palestinian people.

"More than a year has passed since the signing of the Agreement on Principles, on 13 September 1993 in Washington, between the Palestine Liberation Organization and Israel. The Council of the League of Arab States considers that Agreement to be a first important step towards the implementation of the principle of land for peace. Its signing was an important development in the history of the Arab-Israeli conflict.

"The Council of the League adopted its resolution 5092 on 12 September 1992, before the convening of the Madrid Peace Conference. In that resolution, it welcomed the international and regional efforts aimed at the achievement of a just and comprehensive peace in the Middle East and expressed its support for the position of the Arab parties involved in all stages of the peace process.

"All these developments compel this Committee, which plays an important part in the activities of the world Organization, to pursue and intensify its efforts towards the consolidation of the peace process so as to enable the achievement of a definitive and just solution to the Palestinian question in all its aspects. Hence the importance of supporting the autonomous Palestinian Authority, which has assumed its responsibilities in Gaza and Jericho in extremely difficult and complex economic and social circumstances. In order to ensure the success of this experiment in Palestinian self-rule, on the basis of which the future of the entire peace process in all its tracks depends, I urge the Committee to pursue its efforts to urge the United Nations and the international community, particularly the donor countries, to shoulder their responsibilities towards the Palestine Liberation Organization and the Palestinian Authority and extend all forms of support to enable the Authority to take on the challenge of economic and social development.

"It might be appropriate here, Mr. Chairman, for the Committee to issue a statement in this respect on the occasion of the International Day of Solidarity. I am confident that the Committee will spare no effort in continuing its support for the Palestinian people and its national leadership, impelled by its eagerness to

restore their legitimate rights to the Palestinians and by its support for the peace process.

"In conclusion, I wish the Committee every success in its work."

The Chairman *(interpretation from French):* I thank His Excellency Mr. Aboul-Nasr and I ask him to convey to the Secretary-General of the League of Arab States the Committee's sincere thanks for the important message he has sent us.

I now have the pleasure of calling on Mr. Larry Ekin, representative of the International Coordinating Committee for Non-Governmental Organizations on the Question of Palestine.

Mr. Ekin (International Coordinating Committee for Non-Governmental Organizations on the Question of Palestine: For the second consecutive year, I am privileged to accept an invitation to address this solemn gathering. I do so on behalf of my colleagues in the International Coordinating Committee of Non-Governmental Organizations on the Question of Palestine, as well as the North American Coordinating Committee, which I am privileged to chair. I extend greetings on behalf of Mr. Don Betz, the International Chairman, as well as my own colleagues and constituents on the North American Committee.

For the NGO community and, I would imagine, for the Committee as well, this has been a year of rapid, constant change and adjustment. Nearly every day brings new developments, requiring new adjustments.

At the outset, allow me to affirm the ongoing commitment of solidarity with the Palestinian people represented by the organized NGO movement, both in North America as well as internationally.

I should also like to acknowledge the work of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People and also that of the Division for Palestinian Rights. We believe that our work as NGOs with these bodies within the United Nations system represents a dynamic and creative partnership. Working together for more than a decade now, we have learned a great deal about supporting one another's efforts and mobilizing resources. We are hopeful that this innovative partnership will continue to serve the Palestinian people.

We remain mindful that, despite the emergence of the Palestinian National Authority, the goals that we have articulated and supported through the years have yet to be achieved. Thus, we continue to focus our attention on the plight of those Palestinians still living directly under Israeli occupation. We find ourselves distressed by reports reaching us of growing humanitarian needs, constant depletion of resources and an economy choked by political restrictions. We continue to view with apprehension the building and expanding of Israeli settlements in large segments of the occupied territories and, in particular, we believe that steps taken by the Government of Israel in Jerusalem and its environs are prejudicial to any realistic peace process, and, in the final analysis, will prove destructive. We continue to monitor the situation of prisoners, and urge the Government of Israel to hasten the release of Palestinian political prisoners.

We further stand with our Palestinian brothers and sisters in urging the international community to expedite the transfer of funds and resources that will assist the Palestinian people in developing their infrastructure and their civil society. We are hopeful that we will see a renewed commitment to nurturing the seeds of peace.

We further believe that the United Nations and the international community have a real and continuing role to play in relation to the refugees, wherever they may be.

I have already mentioned Jerusalem, and may do so several more times before I finish my remarks. We in the NGO community know that there are Israelis and Palestinians searching for creative solutions to this very difficult political problem. We believe that the Committee and the international community can play an important role in supporting and facilitating these discussions and the search for creative solutions. Equally, or perhaps more importantly, we believe that there is an ongoing need for international monitoring of developments related to the situation. In all these situations, we believe that the NGO community includes people with expertise and resources that will allow us to pursue a creative partnership. We stand ready to assist the Committee in these endeavours.

I have mentioned that a constituency of people exists who continue to be interested in the Palestinian people. Those people continue to look to this Committee for guidance, inspiration and leadership, and we hope that they will find it.

In North America, well over a hundred active NGOs remain affiliated with our Committee. They range in size

from very large, national institutions to small, grass-roots, community-based organizations. Some representatives may have heard reports from the symposium we conducted this past summer in Toronto. We believe that this was one of the best meetings we have ever organized in cooperation with this Committee, and again emphasizes the ongoing attention to this issue of people from throughout North America and internationally.

At that meeting, we received input and benefited immensely from our counterparts in Palestinian NGOs. Again, some representatives may be aware that over this past summer, meetings involving Palestinian NGOs took place throughout the West Bank, the Gaza Strip and Jerusalem. These involved more than 600 Palestinian organizations as the Palestinian NGOs stepped forward to identify their concerns and priorities. The input from these meetings benefited our deliberations, and we hope that this process will continue.

We are well aware that, as the Palestinian National Authority grows and extends its area of influence, some of these Palestinian NGOs will be absorbed into the national framework. At the same time, some of them will choose to remain NGOs. We want to continue to support Palestinian NGOs and their work, and we are hopeful that the Palestinian National Authority will evolve with a flexible attitude that will allow the maximum possible contribution by the NGOs to the Palestinian people and to their social and economic development.

While this is neither the time nor the place to pursue this topic in detail, I would note that, as a community of NGOs, we do have concerns. We believe that the NGO community has exercised a positive and supportive influence over a period of more than 40 years. Many of our constituent organizations were on the scene before governments arrived, even before the United Nations was able to mobilize its resources. We hope that we will be able to continue this productive partnership with the Palestinian people.

At the same time, we acknowledge that we are perhaps experiencing some growing pains. We are hopeful that these will prove to be merely that — a period of adjustment to new roles, new realities, and the development of new but still respectful relations.

If we have concerns, we also have confidence. We have confidence, because we have confidence in the Palestinian people. The Palestinian people have laboured for too many years, endured too many sacrifices, and adhered to democratic ideals for too long for their society not to put these principles into practice in their daily political life.

Looking back over the past year, how many of us here could have predicted the events that have taken place? Looking ahead, how many of us can believe that we can predict with any confidence what will occur? And so, between today and tomorrow, let us renew our pledge to adhere to the principles that we have supported for so many years. Let us stand today in renewed commitment to upholding those principles which this body has articulated through the years. Let us move forward in a spirit of cooperation, with a determination to pursue peace with justice, and in the understanding that the fruits of this peace must produce benefits not only for the people of Israel and Palestine but indeed for the entire region and the whole world.

The Chairman *(interpretation from French)*: I thank Mr. Ekin for his statement and request that he convey to the International Coordinating Committee our thanks for the valuable contribution that non-governmental organizations have always made to the Committee's work.

It is my honour now to announce that the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People has received messages of support and solidarity from many Heads of State and Government, Ministers of Foreign Affairs, governments and organizations. I shall now read out a list of those messages. The text of the messages will be published in a special bulletin of the Division for Palestinian Rights.

First of all, we have received messages from the following Heads of State: His Excellency Mr. Nouhak Phoumsavanh, President of the Lao People's Democratic Republic; His Excellency Mr. Abdou Diouf, President of the Republic of Senegal; His Excellency Mr. Liamine Zeroual, President of Algeria; His Excellency Mr. Burhan-ud-dun Rabbani, President of the Islamic State of Afghanistan; His Excellency Mr. Ernesto Pérez Balladares, President of the Republic of Panama; His Excellency Mr. Carlos Salinas de Gortari, President of Mexico; His Excellency Mr. Lansana Conte, President of the Republic of Guinea; Her Excellency Mrs. Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga, President of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka; Her Excellency Mrs. Violeta Barrios de Chamorro, President of Nicaragua; His Excellency Mr. Boris Yeltsin, President of the Russian Federation; King Fahd Bin Abdul-Aziz Al-Saud, Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques; His Highness Sheikh Khalifa

Bin Hamad Al-Thani, Emir of the State of Qatar; His Excellency Mr. Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, President of the Islamic Republic of Iran; His Highness Sheikh Zayed Bin Sultan Al Nahyan, President of the United Arab Emirates; His Excellency Mr. Le Duc Anh, President of the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam; His Excellency Mr. Mohamed Hosni Mubarak, President of the Arab Republic of Egypt; the People's Central Committee of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea; His Excellency Mr. Glafcos Clerides, President of the Republic of Cyprus; and His Excellency Dr. Fidel Castro, President of the Council of State of the Republic of Cuba.

We have also received messages from the following Heads of Government: Her Excellency Mrs. Tansu Çiller, Prime Minister of the Republic of Turkey; Her Excellency Mrs. Mohtarma Beenazir Bhutto, Prime Minister of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan; His Excellency Mr. Li Peng, Prime Minister of the People's Republic of China; His Excellency Mr. Chuan Leekpai, Prime Minister of Thailand; His Excellency Mr. Felipe González, President of the Government of Spain; and His Excellency Datuk Seri Dr. Mahathir Bin Mohamed, Prime Minister of Malaysia.

The Governments of Guyana and South Africa have also sent messages.

The following Ministers of Foreign Affairs have sent messages: His Excellency Mr. Fares Boueiz, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Lebanon; His Excellency Mr. Farouk Al-Sharaa, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Syrian Arab Republic; His Excellency Mr. Yousef Bin Alawi Bin Abdullah, Minister of State for Foreign Affairs of the Sultanate of Oman; His Excellency Mr. Yohei Kono, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of Japan; His Excellency Mr. Guido Di Tella, Minister of Foreign Relations and International Trade and Culture of the Argentine Republic; His Excellency Mr. Brian Alleyne, Minister of External Affairs and OECS Unity (Organization of Eastern Caribbean States) of the Commonwealth of Dominica; His Excellency Mr. Ruhakana Rugunda, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Uganda; His Excellency Mr. Karolos Papoulias, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Greece; His Excellency Mr. Gennadi Udovenko, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine; His Excellency Dr. Nathan Shamuyarira, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Zimbabwe; His Excellency Mr. Celso Amorim, Minister of External Relations of the Federative Republic of Brazil; His Excellency and Mr. Omar Mustafa Muntasser, Secretary of the General People's Committee for Foreign Relations and International Cooperation of the Socialist People's Libyan Arab Jamahiriya.

We also received messages from His Excellency Dr. Salim Ahmed Salim, Secretary-General of the Organization of African Unity, and from Mr. Hamid Algabid, Secretary-General of the Organization of the Islamic Conference.

From specialized agencies, we have received a message from Mr. Federico Mayor, Director-General of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization.

From non-governmental organizations, we have received a message from the International Progress Organization.

On behalf of the Committee as a whole, I should like to express our sincere appreciation to the Heads of State and Government, the Ministers of Foreign Affairs, Governments and the organizations I have just listed and to all participants for their constant efforts towards a comprehensive, just and lasting solution to the question of Palestine and for the support they have always given to the objectives and activities of our Committee. The statements that we have heard and the messages of solidarity we have received today demonstrate once again the determination of the international community to progress towards the establishment of peace in the Middle East through the attainment of the inalienable national rights of the Palestinian people in accordance with United Nations resolutions. I can assure you that we, the members of the Committee for the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, will spare no effort for the achievement of those objectives.

I now have the pleasure of calling on Mr. Farouk Kaddoumi, Head of the Political Department of the Palestine Liberation Organization.

Mr. Kaddoumi (Palestine Liberation Organization) (*interpretation from Arabic*): It gives me great pleasure, at the conclusion of this ceremony held in solidarity with the Palestinian people, to express to you our profound gratitude for the ceaseless efforts you have made in support of the right of the Palestinian people to exercise their inalienable national rights. I should like to thank all members of the Committee for the efforts they have made towards the attainment of this noble objective.

It also gives me great pleasure to extend our thanks to all participants for having come to share this commemoration. I wish in particular to mention those who made statements at the beginning of the meeting: the President of the General Assembly, the President of the

Security Council and the representative of the Secretary-General. I wish also to thank the Chairman of the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories for his objective depiction of the situation in our occupied lands.

I am grateful also for the messages sent by the Heads of State and Government and the Foreign Ministers of friendly countries to express their solidarity with the Palestinian people and their support for our national rights. My thanks go also to all our friends who have joined us in commemorating this Day, by being with us here today, by sending messages, or by otherwise expressing their solidarity with the Palestinian people.

I reiterate my thanks to you, Mr. Chairman, to all those present in this Room, and to all members of the Committee, a Committee that is working hard to enable the Palestinian people to exercise their inalienable rights. I hope that, in the changing circumstances of the Middle East, the march towards peace will reach the successful conclusion the international community desires.

The Chairman (*interpretation from French*): I take this opportunity to thank everyone who made this meeting possible, in particular the members of the Division for Palestinian Rights, the Office of Conference Services, the Department of Public Information and the security officers and everyone else who works behind the scenes.

I want to remind everyone that the exhibit arranged by the office of the Permanent Observer of Palestine, under the auspices of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, will be opened today at 6 p.m. in the public lobby of the General Assembly building, and that the ceremony will be followed by a reception.

The meeting rose at 12.15 p.m.